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SERMON BY THE REV. GREGORY T. BEDELL, D. D.

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CHRIST CRUCIFIED:

A Sermon

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"We preach CHRIST crucified."—1 *Corinthians*, i. 28.

UNDER all circumstances this is an appropriate text for a Christian minister. If he sets out from this point, he may find a direct road to every truth of the Bible which stands essentially connected with the salvation of man; and let him light upon what truth he may in the whole circle of religion, he will find that from it, there is a direct and open road to this. If he does not set out from this, and attempts to reach any vital truth, he will find himself wandering in darkness, and he will eventually stumble and fall. But appropriate as this text is under all circumstances, it is remarkably adapted to the present occasion,* when our minds are naturally turned from the *doctrine* to the *fact*, and then from the fact back again upon the doctrine.

In the wise arrangements of our Church, my friends, we are all annually called to contemplate the stupendous transaction which, as on this day, took place on the mount of Calvary. It was there that the LORD JESUS CHRIST suffered the ignominious death of the cross, the purpose of which had been distinctly foretold years before its actual occurrence. But I have too much before me to-day to suffer my mind to be led back to the time of Isaiah and the Prophets. We have an absorbing present concern. Following the example of the apostle I say, "We preach CHRIST crucified"—and the divisions under which this discourse will be arranged are as follows:

* Good Friday.

I. What is this, "CHRIST crucified?"
II. Why do we preach it?

I. What is this? I offer you two ideas:

1. It is a FACT. What I mean by this is, that as a matter of history, there was such a person as JESUS CHRIST, who in the days of the emperor Augustus, and under the government of Pontius Pilate, suffered the death of the cross. Apart from all other circumstances, there is an historical interest attached to this fact, which makes it stand *sui generis* in the history of the world. About the year 4000, there appeared in Judea a man of austere habits, an unsocial man; one who loved the solitude of his own contemplations, and yet one who appeared forced into public life. And when he came forth before men, he announced himself in language strangely mysterious: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the LORD and make his paths straight,"—and he went about Judea, "crying repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He did not appear solicitous to make converts to himself, for his speech was rough and discouraging: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come." But not long had this man been calling his countrymen to repentance, when there appeared ANOTHER still more mysterious, and when the *first one* saw him, he seemed struck by some unearthly vision, and he cried, "Behold the LAMB of GOD." In a little while we perceive his still more mysterious personage going about the land of Judea. Around him he attracted a few of the poor and illiterate fishermen from the lake of Gallilee, and with them he went the circuit of the land. The poor seemed to love him, for he healed their sick; there was a strange power about him to drive out disease, and death itself was not equal to his arm. By and bye his walk of love seems to have excited the indignation of the higher authorities, and he was watched and troubled, and his path beset with snares. Yet he gave no cause of offence; against the civil or ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the land he manifested no turbulent or rebellious spirit. "He was holy, and harmless, and separate from sinners;" he did no man wrong—he did all men kindness. But there was a mysterious grandeur about the benevolence of his

character which made him an object of hatred. Attempts upon attempts were made to bring him under the power of some law; but he violated none. Still his presence troubled the authorities, and there was no peace when he walked. Upon false pretences he was brought before an ecclesiastical court,—by perjured witnesses was he declared guilty of blasphemy, and dragged to the tribunal of the Roman power. No resistance did he make, no disapprobation did he evince; his countenance was as placid as the lake near which he had often walked when it reflected the softest hues of the summer's even. The judge on his seat pronounced him innocent; no real crime was charged; no crime was proven. Yet pronounced *innocent*, he was condemned as if guilty. This innocent man was made the sport of his persecutors: there were thorns placed upon his brow, and his face, which beamed with benignity, ran down with blood; stripes were laid upon his unresisting shoulders, and he murmured not; indignity upon indignity was offered him, and he made no reproaches. There was a calm, a holy calm, in his sufferings, which might have moved a heart of stone; but it could not move the infuriate hearts of his persecutors. This innocent man was led out from Jerusalem, bending beneath the weight of the instrument of his torture; he toiled up the hill of Calvary, and to the cross which he had carried was he nailed. And all this while this mysterious man made no complaints, no protests, no threats, no angry replies. There were a few words fell from his lips, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." In a short time he died and was buried. Thus was "CHRIST crucified,"—a FACT of history—a fact mysterious in all its circumstances—but a *fact* undoubted. When, then, according to the text, "we preach CHRIST crucified," we mean that we lay before you this *fact*.

But we lay before you this *fact* for the purpose of a further advancement, and on that fact,

2. We preach CHRIST crucified as a DOCTRINE. That is, the fact *teaches* us something; there are things of consummate importance connected with it, necessary that we should learn; and when we preach CHRIST crucified, we mean simply to bring before your minds the reason of this fact and the results which it

was intended to secure. "CHRIST crucified," as a *doctrine*, is, in its most simple form of expression, that method which a GOD of infinite purity and holiness has devised, by which he might extend pardon to his guilty and rebellious creatures. We mean by it, that the death of CHRIST was a satisfaction made to the Divine justice for the sins of mankind, the benefits of which we personally appropriate by faith in CHRIST, or the acceptance of him as a Savior; we mean that without this faith in CHRIST as a Divine Savior and sacrifice for sin, that faith which receives him as a Savior, we have no rational hope of Heaven. The Scripture representation is most emphatically summed up in the Articles and Liturgy of our Church. Let me call your attention to the language, "the offering of CHRIST once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual." (Article XXXI.) In the exhortation to the Communion, that ordinance is spoken of as to be by believers, "received in remembrance of his (CHRIST'S) meritorious Cross and Passion whereby *alone* we obtain remission of our sins and are made partakers of the kingdom of Heaven," and in another exhortation, "above all things ye must give most humble and hearty thanks to GOD, the FATHER, the SON and the HOLY GHOST, for the redemption of the world by the Death and Passion of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who did humble himself even to the death upon the cross, for us miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death; that he might make us the children of GOD, and exalt us to everlasting life:" and in the prayer of Consecration: "all glory be to thee, Almighty GOD, our Heavenly Father, for that thou of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son, JESUS CHRIST, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (on the cross) by his one oblation of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

Were I to repeat the Scripture passages on which these quotations are founded, and where the doctrine is set forth in the words of inspiration, I should occupy your time far beyond the period allowed me. Suffice it to quote, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is JESUS CHRIST," "there is no

other name under Heaven given among men whereby we may be saved but the name of JESUS CHRIST," "CHRIST came into the world to save sinners," "In whom we have redemption by his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins."

As this is the subject of my continued pulpit instructions, and as much of what is involved in the idea of "CHRIST crucified," as a doctrine, will be connected with my subsequent discussion, I shall pass on to my second division; which is the question,

II. Why do we preach this?—and the answer is,

1. Because we know of no other way of saving sinners. Other methods have been tried, but have always failed. On this subject, there is a method of placing the truth before you, which may serve a more important purpose than argument: It is the mere naked statement of facts. The following, is from a speech of one of our Indians, on the best method of converting the Heathen. "Brethren, I have been a Heathen myself, and grown old among them; I therefore know their modes of thinking. A preacher once came to us, desiring to instruct us; and began by proving to us that there was a GOD, on which we said to him, 'Well, and dost thou think we are ignorant of that? Go back to the place whence thou camest?' Then again another preacher came, and began to instruct us, saying, 'You must not steal, or become inebriated, or tell falsehoods, or lead abandoned lives.' We answered him; 'Thinkest thou that we know not that? Go and practically learn these things thyself, and then teach them to thine own people; for who are more addicted to such vices than they?' Thus we sent him away also. At length a missionary came to my hut, and sat down by me. The contents of his discourse were nearly these; 'I come to thee, in the name of the LORD of Heaven and earth. He sends me to acquaint thee, that he would gladly save thee, and make thee happy, and deliver thee from the miserable condition in which thou at present liest. To this end he became man; gave his life a ransom for man, and shed his blood for man; all that believe in the name of this JESUS, obtain the forgiveness of sins. To all that receive him by faith, he giveth power to become the sons of GOD. The HOLY SPIRIT

dwelleth in their hearts; and they are made free, through the blood of CHRIST from the slavery of sin. And though thou art the chief of sinners; yet, if thou prayest the Father in his name, and believest in him as the sacrifice for thy sins, thou shalt be heard and saved, and he will give thee a crown of life, and thou shalt live with him forever in Heaven?' I could not," added the converted native, "I could not forget his words. They constantly recurred to my mind; even in sleep, I dreamed of the blood which CHRIST shed for us. If, then," continued he, "you would have your words gain an entrance among the Heathen, preach to them CHRIST JESUS, his blood, his sufferings, and his death." Such was the judgment of this converted Heathen, and it may be illustrated and confirmed by the examination of almost any page in the history of idolatry.

Again. I was lately reading a very interesting work, viz: Polynesian Researches, or the History of Missions in the Pacific, and I was struck with the following passage, which, at the time of reading I marked down, for the purpose of using it in this discourse. It relates to the preaching of the missionaries in the island of Tahiti. "It was the custom of the missionaries, not only to instruct the natives in the school, preach to them in the chapel, and itinerate through the villages, but to assemble them for the purpose of reading from manuscript such portions of the Scripture as were deemed suitable to the circumstances. On one of these occasions, Mr. Nott was reading the first portion of the Gospel of St. John, to a number of the natives; when he had finished the sixteenth verse of the third chapter, a native who had listened with avidity to the words, interrupted him and said, 'what words are these you read; what words were those I heard? Let me hear those words again.' Mr. Nott again read the verse—GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. When the native arose from his seat, and said, 'Is that true? Can that be true? GOD love the world, when the world not love him? GOD so love the world as to give his son to die, that man not die? Can that be true?' Mr. Nott again read the verse, told him that it was true, and that it was the message GOD

had sent to them, and that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. The overwhelming feelings of the native were too powerful for restraint or expression,—He burst into tears, and as these chased each other down his cheeks, he retired to meditate in private, on the amazing love of GOD which had that day reached his soul; and there was every reason to believe he was afterwards raised to share the peace and happiness resulting from the love of GOD, shed abroad in his heart."

Besides this, there is another most striking instance in the case of the deservedly distinguished Dr. Chalmers—I will give his own language. "I cannot," says he "but record the effect of an actual, and undesigned experiment which I prosecuted for upwards of twelve years. During that time, I am not sensible that all the vehemence with which I urged the virtues and proprieties of social life, had the weight of a feather on the moral habits of my parishioners, and it was not till I got impressed by the utter alienation of the heart, in its desires and affections from GOD; it was not till reconciliation to him, became the distinct and prominent object of my ministerial exertions; it was not till I took the Scriptural way of laying the method of reconciliation before them; it was not till the free offer of forgiveness, through the blood of CHRIST, was urged upon their acceptance, and the HOLY SPIRIT given through the channel of CHRIST'S mediation to all who ask him, was set before them, as the unceasing object of their dependence and their prayers; it was not, in one word, till the contemplation of my people were turned to these great and essential elements in the business of a soul providing for its interest with GOD, and the concerns of eternity, that I ever heard of any of these subordinate reformations which I aforetime made the earnest and the zealous, but I am afraid, at the same time, the ultimate object of my earlier ministrations."

It is his solemn declaration, "that preaching CHRIST is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches." This is a subject of deep interest and value, and tells to perfect satisfaction from the experience of one of the greatest men now living; that as the preaching of CHRIST is the only way of preaching morality in all its branches, it is of course the only way of

making sinners what they ought to be; or in other words, converting them from the error of their ways, to serve the living GOD. And this is a main, and sufficiently impressive reason why we preach CHRIST crucified.

2. Another reason is, that this is the one great and distinguishing method adopted by the first and most successful preachers of the Gospel of the Savior.

Look at the apostles when they went forth to convert the world, and ascertain the subjects on which they insisted, in order to accomplish their object on the hearts and consciences of their hearers. The language of my text, in its impressive connection, will give you the information of their method. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but WE preach CHRIST crucified; to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, CHRIST the power of GOD and the wisdom of GOD." Examine also the declaration of the same apostle in another chapter. "For I determine not to know any thing among you, save JESUS CHRIST and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the SPIRIT and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of GOD." And now observe the result of this mode of proceeding. It is most beautifully and truly said by Cunningham—"During the life of CHRIST, though that life was adorned by every thing most lovely and attractive; though he spake as never man spake; though his ministry was surrounded by a blaze of miracles and mighty demonstrations of the power of GOD, few converts, comparatively, were made. But as soon as the apostles could plead the death of their master—could lead the sinner to the tomb of his Savior—could exhibit the Son of GOD, bleeding and mangled on the cross, a new impulse appears to have been given to religion, and fresh power to every sentence which they uttered. St. Peter no sooner stood up and proclaimed the Savior, whom his hearers, with wicked hands, had crucified and slain, then multitudes, as by power resistless, 'were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren what shall we do?'

And thus, by the power of the cross, were touched, were convinced, and converted, and three thousand added to the Church. And when his brother apostle went forth in the strength of the same principles, it is written, 'then mightily grew the word of GOD and prevailed.'

"It is, therefore, necessary, and indispensably so, to consider the triumphs of the Gospel as obtained by the very simplicity of this impressive doctrine.

"The once bigotted Jew, and the profligate Gentile;—the proud member of the only true Church then on earth, and the polluted Idolater;—the nations which slept in darkness, and practised and justified every abomination; the luxurious worshipper of Jupiter and the Pantheon; and the naked and savage Druid of the British isles;—all these, reclaimed as we now behold them, from ignorance, and guilt, and blood, are to be regarded as so many witnesses to the power of the doctrine of the Cross; that momentous truth,—that the SON of GOD 'gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice for sin.'"

3. Once more—It is the method CHRIST himself pointed out. There is one passage of Scripture, very seldom thought of, and very seldom quoted in this connection, but which, nevertheless, conveys to my mind a most wonderful emphasis of meaning: "And I," says the Lord JESUS CHRIST, "if I be LIFTED UP will draw all men unto me." It refers unquestionably, in its primary bearing, to the solemn fact of his crucifixion, when he was lifted up on the cross, like the serpent in the wilderness, "that whosoever believeth on Him may receive eternal life;" but it had a much more extensive reference. The *lifting* up of CHRIST is the *full and faithful preaching* of the doctrine of my text—JESUS CHRIST a sacrifice for sin;—"who made, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice."

Why is it, that among that class of nominal Christians who deny the divinity of CHRIST, and the saving efficacy of his atonement—why is it, that among them we hear of no revivals of religion, no anxious inquirers pressing with most painful and intense anxiety the question, "What shall we do to be saved?"—No zealous effort to convert the world to the truth of JESUS? Why do we hear of no such things among them? Because the

animating impulse of it all is wanting; JESUS CHRIST is not *lifted* up. He is rather sunk down to the level of frail humanity, and the attractions of his cross denied. Why is it, that even among Churches which are sound in principle, we do often find so much coldness, and lukewarmness, and indifference, and worldliness?—It is because while what is preached may be truth as far as it goes, CHRIST is not yet "lifted up" as he should be: moral suasion, or some mere technicallity of sectarian peculiarity, is substituted for the attractions of the cross. Taking the word of CHRIST for a guide, it were sufficient for us to come to the determination, that men are to be converted, they are to be drawn to him, only when he is "lifted up." And this is a grand and paramount reason why "*we* preach CHRIST crucified."

Brethren, it is peculiarly adapted to the solemnities of this day to present before you the *fact*, and on that fact the doctrine, of JESUS CHRIST and him crucified. Sinners, careless and unconcerned, it is the cross that I lift up before you this day. On that instrument of torture hung the Savior; who there for you poured out his soul, even unto death; and yet instead of feeling an interest, such as should be felt by those whose only possibility of salvation rests in the sacrifice there made, and the blood there poured out, you are indifferent—unconcerned—impenitent. There are no movements of gratitude upon your hearts—no language of gratitude upon your lips. There are no tears of sorrow in your eyes—and, in the whole of your life and conversation, not one living exhibition of the least concern. This day I charge, in the name of GOD, upon every unconverted man and woman, that you stand around the cross of CHRIST, the cold and heartless spectators of a scene of agony unparalleled; while it was for *you* that all this suffering was so calmly, so patiently endured. But let me not utter one syllable which may this day seem like harshness or reproach. No! not even may I reproach sinners with ingratitude; for from the lips of Him who was crucified there fell no language but that of prayer for his persecutors; there were no reproaches but the eloquent reproaches of agony and blood! Have the stripes in the judgment hall of Pilate no voice for sinners? Hath the crown of thorns no argument? Is there no pleading in the weary and blood-stained pathway up the hill of Calvary? Is there no

tongue in the nails which pierced his hands and his feet, or the spear which entered into his side? Is there no eloquence in the silent suffering of the cross—its shame, its agony, its blood? What will not the heart withstand which can withstand the sufferings on Calvary's mount endured?

> "For me those pangs his soul assail,
> For me this death is borne;
> My sins gave sharpness to the nail,
> And pointed every thorn."

To draw you to this Savior; to touch your hearts; to save your souls; O sinners! I this day tell you, "we preach CHRIST crucified."

NOTE.—Having been unexpectedly asked by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Meade to preach in Alexandria at the time when several members of the seminary were to be ordained, the author, having no sermon with him more appropriate than the present, added the following remarks:

In drawing this discourse to a close, I would address myself to those who are this day to be invested with the sacred dignities of the ministerial office. My dear friends, what can I say to you, or what ought I to say to you, which is not directly connected with my text? I might speak something as to your personal demeanor, for in the charge of an apostle we find it written, "take heed," not only to "thy doctrine," but "take heed unto *thyself*." Not only the personal piety, but the outward demeanor of a minister of the Gospel are matters of extreme importance. By the mercies of GOD I beseech you, as you are young, to be particularly circumspect as to your intercourse with the world. I do not ask you to be austere, but I wish you to be grave and dignified; always maintain such a conduct as may indicate self respect, and never give room either for yourselves or for your religion to be treated with levity. I leave you to read what Paul said to Timothy and Titus, for I have no time to enter into the minutiæ of these matters. My subject relates to the *preaching* of the Gospel. Let that be "JESUS CHRIST and him crucified,"—nothing else. I do most earnestly beseech you to examine every sermon you now

have, and every one that you may hereafter write, for the express purpose of acertaining whether they be full of JESUS CHRIST. If they are not—*burn* them; do not inflict on any people to whom you may minister, the curse of a *Christless sermon.* I have heard discourses in which even the name of JESUS did not occur, and though I am aware that He may be named in a discourse, and that frequently, where there is no real spirituality, yet it is even better so than that there should be a discourse without both. Even the *name* of the "precious" Savior and his cross carry some energy along. It is "as ointment poured forth." But what I mean is, let CHRIST be the sum and substance. This implies, that every discourse recognises the totality of man's depravity, his need of a Savior, his perishing condition without CHRIST. It implies, that every discourse directs sinners to JESUS CHRIST, as "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and to the HOLY SPIRIT as He who "takes of the things of CHRIST and shows them unto us." It implies that every discourse speaks of repentance, and faith, and conversion, and sanctification. What! bring all these things into every discourse? Yes! bring every one of them into *every discourse.* Let not one ingredient be wanting. There can be no good sermon in which every one of them will not naturally appear, or from which the implication is not too obvious to be mistaken. You may preach fine discourses,—elegant discourses,—discourses which may make the people look at you with amazement, and all without CHRIST; and yet every one of these discourses will be labor lost, and more than lost. Let me assure you, my friends, that of all the temptations which ever besets the path of a young minister, and many an old one too, there is none so strong as the temptation of preaching a discourse which may show HIMSELF. Nothing will check this disposition to raise one's self but that true humility of heart which determines, by the grace of GOD, to make CHRIST prominent. Lift him up, and hide yourselves behind him! My dear young friends, preach "CHRIST crucified," and your message to sinners will be blessed. There is no attraction like that of the cross. Genius, talent, rare intellectual attainment, may excite to yourselves admiration, but the cross of CHRIST *draws sinners.* Let that cross be your personal attraction, and all will be safe and well. GOD be with you. Amen.